

ABOUT THE ESTUARY EXPERIENCE…

About the guests…

Estuary is for two distinct groups of people:

1. …those within churches, who, for whatever reason, are de-constructing, are asking bigger questions than are commonly discussed in church communities, and who may therefore be looking elsewhere for answers...
2. …those outside any Christian community, who, in a search for meaning, may be re-thinking prior commitments, or who may have been challenged by people like Jordan Peterson, when he says that "we ignore the Bible at our peril", and who are beginning to look into what that means, but are by no means ready to connect with any church…

Estuary represents for such people a place to explore bigger questions, review and compare notes with others, and experience a sense of normalcy, and even community, in the company of other explorers.

About the hosts…

If I am to be a helpful host in an estuary group, this requires that:

1. …I am high in openness, and not easily put off by unconventional ideas or perspectives.
2. …I am able to allow for the possibility that I do not see the whole picture, and that I may be wrong about many things.
3. …I am able to set aside my own agenda long enough to encourage participants to explore the validity of their own ideas at their own pace.
4. …I am able to model for the group excellent, or at least good enough, listening skills.

About estuary protocol…

1. If there are any new people present (even just one) we begin by introducing ourselves: state your name, where you live (i.e. how far did you drive to get here?), what brought you here? (i.e what sequence of events led up to you being here?), and why are you here? (what are you looking for?)
2. Next, we need to get some stuff on the table to have a conversation about. To get stuff on the table from which to select, we go around the room and share with the group: Since the last time we were together, what has gotten your attention in any one, or several, of the following categories:
    a. **Intellectually**: what books, articles have you read, podcasts, lectures listened to? Etc.
    b. **Contextually**: what is happening in your context, (neighborhood, town, state, country) what is in the newspaper, or your Google news feed, that got your attention?
    c. **Personally**: what might you want to share with the group about your personal situation: babies born, new job, new home, divorce, death in the family, etc.
    d. **Estuarily**: any comments, questions, observations about how we run this group. i.e. what could we do better, move to a different location, serve better refreshments, get a new leader, etc. (ownership)
3. Next, we go around the room again to select, from what is now on the table, that which we might fruitfully pursue for the remainder of our time together. (obviously, this requires we all listen carefully to what is being shared during the previous round so as to be able to vote up or down appropriately)
4. Next we converse, again, with special emphasis on listening well. No crosstalk, no interruptions, be generous with time so others have a chance to speak as well.

This format encourages optimum participation, gives everyone the opportunity to at least put their own topic on the table, and allows the leader to show up without having to do any significant topic preparation. Also, anyone may pass.

About the venue…

There is an ongoing debate among estuary leaders about where these estuary groups should be located. Some prefer a bar or restaurant, with refreshments and atmosphere. Others prefer spaces attached to a church, both for financial reasons (low cost), and for symbolic reasons: who should sponsor estuary? Who should initiate its development? Who cares, and why?